

Away by michael gow



Away by Michael Gow BY ztnger7 Away Set in the Australian summer of 1967, Michael GoWs Away is an elaborate play which explores the ideas of self- discovery and change. Through the war affected nation, three families, each from different social classes, depart on an iconic Australian holiday to the beach. In the play, Gow utilises the characters to demonstrate that going away physically is intrinsically linked to their mental developments. With the help of references to Shakespeare's A Midsummer night's Dream, Away uses Gwen and Coral to show the significant psychological changes made by the characters uring holidays to the coast.

Tom throughout the play acts as a catalyst for the change in other characters and is associated with Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Before the vacation, Gwen is depicted as a materialistic snob who constantly tries to pick fights and goes great lengths to prove that she is superior. At the beginning of Away, Gow introduces Gwen's spiteful and materialistic nature when she insults Tom and his family by saying that 'They shouldn't be going a holiday if they can't afford one. '(pl 1).

Her snide and aggressive nature is also seen later in the lay, when Gwen is packing bags with Meg; Gwen criticises Megs behaviour and tries to prove to Meg that she is far more superior. Further in the play, Gwen purposefully leaves Megs Christmas present behind in hope to start a fight; when they do fight, she places the blame on Jim for being careless. Yet, when Meg discovers that Gwen had left the gift behind on purpose, Gwen shifts the argument onto Meg's behaviour and calls her 'A nasty, snide girl' (p32).

Gwen's behaviour in this scene emphasises her spiteful and bellicose nature as she purposefully picks fights just to prove that he is the dominant family member. It can be seen that Gwen was a selfish and bellicose person before she undergoes her transforming Journey of self-discovery. Gwen's remarkable transformation in her character is triggered by Tom's role as a catalyst in the play and by her physical Journey of going away. The first sign of Gwen's transformation is after the storm; Gwen's sense of materialism is diminished as her possessions have been swept away or broken.

During this scene, Gwen realises how easily possessions are lost, thus readjusting her views on what is truly important in life. By using the storm as one of the main turning points for Gwen, Gow explores the power of nature in solving problems and, in this case, it acts as being a power to wash away Gwen's issues. The representation of the four campers as the pixies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and referring the storm to the scene where the all the mayhem caused by Puck is occurring is an ingenious link to the famous Shakespearian play.

The intertextuality references help the audience relate to well-known plays and receive a deeper meaning of *Away*. The Mendelssohn music sets the mood of the scene and gives the audience a hint of the events coming. After talking with Vic, Gwen completes her transformation and loses her difficult, aggressive personality. She becomes an understanding and compassionate mother and is reflected by her conversation with Jim, which she says 'What do you think of me? You must hate me? Why do you still bother? I'm sorry...' (p46). The power of Tom's influence on Gwen is the most prominent in this scene, when Vic and realises his condition.

Here, Gwen opens her mind to the world and finds out that life is precious and easily lost, that people need to enjoy every moment in it. Gwen realises that she has been too selfish and have not allowed her and her family to enjoy themselves, especially Meg. The transformation made by Gwen is essentially linked to her going away as she changes drastically near the end of the play where the storm and Tom come into action. At the start of the play, Coral is presented as a ghost-like figure, a disturbed person detached from the social world. Her mental problems were caused by her grief from losing her son in the Vietnam War.

Just after the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the school, Gow introduces Coral's dysfunctional social behaviour by making her uncommunicative and mysterious. When Gwen asks Coral 'Have you been well? (p9), she does not respond and just stares distantly at Gwen; Coral's behaviour throughout this scene emphasis her dysfunctional and disturbed character. The grieving becomes so intense that throughout the play, Coral pictures other young men as her son. One such case is Tom, when after the school play, Coral says to herself 'That boy! In that blue light the shadows on his face and neck were like bruises.

He looked so sick yet so wonderful, o white, so cold and burning. ' (p12).

Later in the play, Coral meets Rick, who she strikes a successful conversation with. The link between Rick and Coral becomes so intense that they meet on a daily basis. Yet, with all this communicating, Coral's grieving still has a grasp over her as she still sees her son in Rick when she says to him 'A boy like you... talk... talk to me... say something... laugh... ' (p39). Coral, before

her change in her character, is represented as a socially incapable person who has let the grief for her son take over her.

Coral's interactions with Tom have made her undergo her extensive transformation into a healthier, more illuminated person. After the incident with Rick, Coral and Roy's relationship reach breaking point when Roy says 'I'll lock you up if that's what it takes.' (p40). Coral then is forced to flee and hitchhikes to the beach. There, Coral meets Tom, who influences her greatly and triggers her change into a more communicative and sociable person. Under Tom's fatal condition, Coral finally sees the bigger picture and realises that death is imminent; it could happen to anyone, anytime.

She opens her eyes to the fact that she should enjoy every moment of her life and stop grieving for her son. The results of her significant change is shown later on, when Coral does not collect enough firewood and Tom criticises her, she replies saying that she's 'not a pyromaniac,' (p51). Coral's comment indicates that her communicating abilities have developed to the extent that she is able to make sarcastic remarks. Near the end of *Away*, Gow emphasises her successful transformation by making her as one of the main characters in the play *The Stranger on the Shore*. The play is brilliantly linked to

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where the fairies all group together and watch the workmen perform a play. *The Stranger on the Shore* is cleverly written as it perfectly reflects Coral's development throughout the play from the start where she is anti-social because of losing her son which is shown as the woman losing her loved one and then turning into a mermaid,

to the end where she transforms into a healthy and sociable person, depicted as the woman being able to walk normally. Coral's transformation is intrinsically linked to her action of going away as she hitchhikes to